

Ham radio: It's opens up the world

By Kathy Walsh Nufer

Post-Crescent staff writer

In the corner of Myron Jackson's classroom at Madison Junior High School sits a collection of mix-and-match radio equipment, a hand-me-down computer and old teletype machines.

This is the school's brand new ham radio station and all-around gathering place for students who are just beginning to discover an exciting pastime with global possibilities.

Jackson has been a ham radio buff since childhood when his father and a neighbor first introduced him to the airwaves. "My dad used to set up a used old Model-T Ford coil," he recalled, "and I used to visit a neighbor, a TV repairman, who was really into ham radio."

In college Jackson met a student who had his own ham radio station at school. After that, it didn't take long for him to get a license.

Over the last 25 years, Jackson has demonstrated his radio equipment to his students on occasion. Invariably they've found his hobby fascinating. "The kids are always intrigued when I bring it in," he said.

When the opportunity came up last school year to apply for an Appleton Education Association mini-grant, Jackson put in his request for funding to set up a ham radio station at Madison.



SHAWN BELLING and instructor **Myron Jackson** look over teletype messages.

Because his idea was "new, innovative and risk-taking," Jackson's project was one of six selected.

Jackson, who is president of the Fox Cities Radio Amateur Club, has visions of opening all kinds of doors for young people via ham radio.

Since the school station began operating first semester, young enthusiasts, under Jackson's supervision, have been able to talk to other ham operators in such far-off places as Lithuania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Italy and Argentina, not to mention people in the United States and Canada.

The wall near the station is covered with cards from people all over North America to whom the students have talked, plus a map with sign prefixes for every part of the world.

Jackson has managed to make ham radio relevant in foreign language classes, English, social studies and science.

There's no better way to bring French, German or Spanish to life than to have the students try it out with other hams around the globe, he said.

Jackson also has conducted novice classes for prospective hams. The first 11-week session for students and adults had 25 participants. A second is now under way.

By the time a student earns the novice license, he or she has learned a lot about radio theory, and international rules and regulations, and has a pretty good working knowledge of the Morse Code.

Josh Griswold, a ninth-grader who earned his novice license through Jackson, spends almost every noon hour in Jackson's classroom using the radio.

"I like electronics and I really like radio," he said, noting how his interest was piqued when Jackson brought his radio into the seventh grade science class.

"I like talking to other countries," Griswold said, citing his visits with other ham operators in Puerto Rico a month after Hurricane Hugo. "I mostly use Morse Code."

Jackson said the American Radio Relay League is encouraging schools around the country to start ham radio stations in hopes of developing pen pal activities and eventually voice pals. "There is lots

of potential and a lot of opportunities for kids, if they're interested."

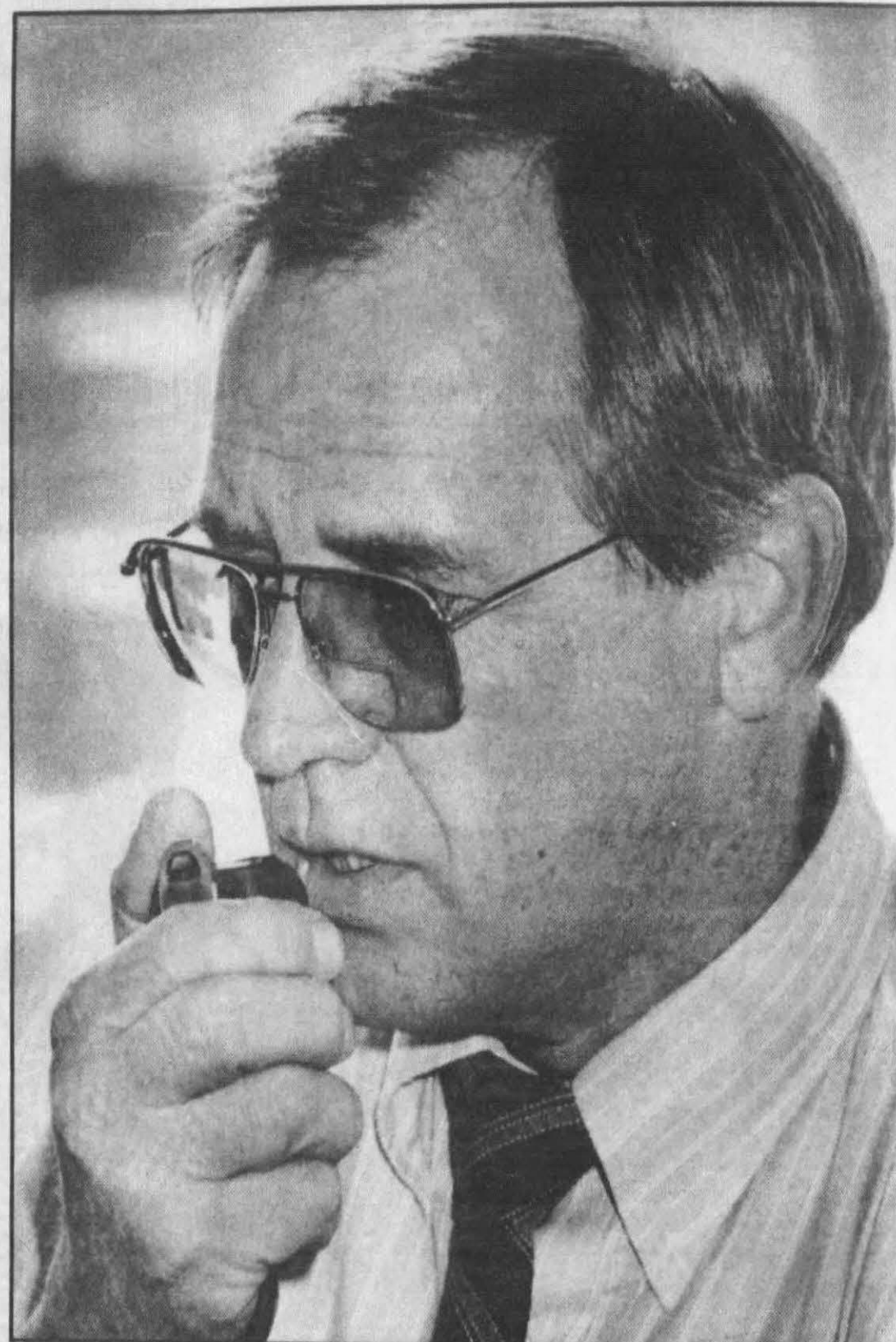
In addition to the school station at Madison, Jackson has taken his radio equipment to elementary schools, including Johnston, McKinley and Horizons, for demonstrations.

From him, children get a sampling of the history of communication technology, ranging from a static generator used by Marconi, inventor of the wireless, to the

modern day boom box.

One little girl thrilled by the opportunity to talk to someone in Germany wrote him a thank you saying she "must be one of the luckiest Apex students in the world."

"Just a brief contact like that widens their horizons as to the world community," said Jackson, adding that it helps them realize that people in foreign lands are "just like them."



Post-Crescent photos by Mark Courtney

ABOVE, Myron Jackson demonstrates proper use of the radio. Below, a key is used until an operator can get a voice license. At left, Josh Griswold sends out signals via the key, a handset that uses Morse Code to communicate to other hams.

